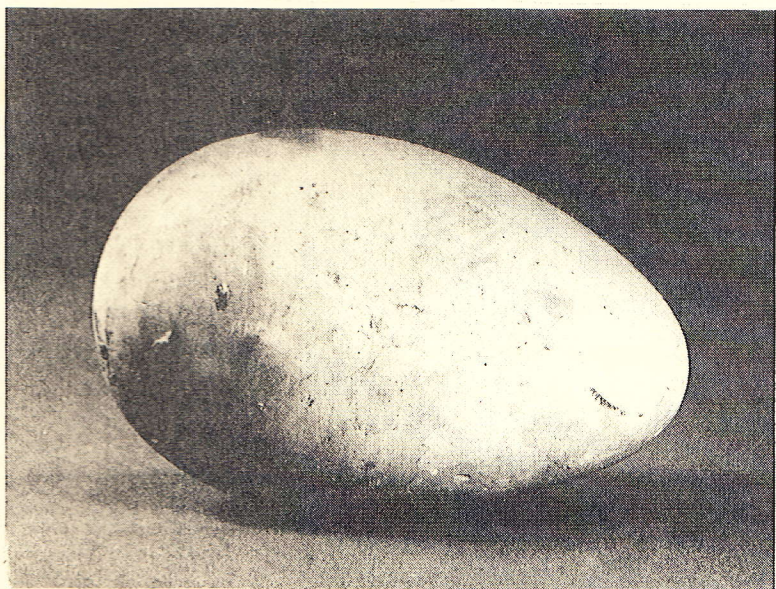


# THE IMPIETY OF G R O W T H

*selected poems by Karen Downie*



Introduction by R.JXP.

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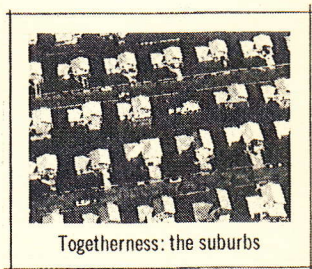


Photograph of Ms. Downie  
with her cat Funtintae  
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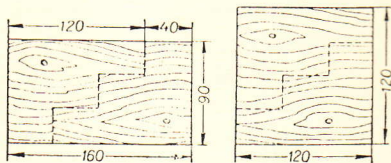
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Togetherness: the suburbs

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WHAT IS THE ENGINEER'S LAST NAME?

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# Collecting Slugs

Karen Downie and the Poetry of Forgetting

by R. John Xerxes

## Cups of Beer in the Garden

Mrs. Stern used to put those ribbed picnic cups, sometimes blue sometimes red, in the middle of her garden to collect the slugs which were devouring her flowering pride and joy. The concept, which she explained to my mother one summer afternoon still heavy with the pungent odor of fresh lawn cuttings, was simple enough : the slugs would wiggle into the beer cups drawn by the beer's sweaty aroma wherein they would drown themselves. My mother, not yet the developed gardener she is today, tried this backyard trick. I watched as she poured two copiously full plastic cups and stuck them only a few feet apart in the very center of her tiny garden patch.

In the recklessness of the summer after supper twilight, with its long shadows and aggressive moon, there was a whole new day unto itself, a re-birth in semi-darkness. I would be forbidden to wander too far from the house and would have to be home when the street lights buzzed on, so I usually ended up embroiled in a full stomach kick ball game against the encroaching darkness and neighborhood bullies. I remember that evening there were no other kids sulking about on the front lawns or porches, so I boarded the orange metal frame of my bicycle and rode back and forth, tracing invisible errant paths between ten houses. I searched the terrain for any distraction, any cohorts, all I found were some bloated ants slowly picking apart a pinkish gray drowned worm. As I sat on the grotesque yellow ribbed plastic banana seat shot through with beads of silvery sparkles, one leg firmly planted on the broken concrete so it acted as a naked fleshy kickstand, I watched the frantic hungry ant dance. I heard before I saw the slurred eloquence of Kevin Clifton. Kevin was three years older than me, but being the youngest of five brothers he possessed secret knowledge which he failed to process into complete understandings. In addition to this information overload, his parents and siblings ignored him when they did not entertain themselves with his terror and torture. Kevin Clifton's malfeasance occasionally broke my toys and mercilessly teased me,

but since he was my next door neighbor, I could not easily escape his grasp and we were friends.

I looked up from where the dead worm was being dismantled to see Kevin knitting a complicated path through the lawns across the street. He stumbled when he tried to step into the road and fling an empty plastic cup into the air, simultaneously. He crawled to a stop, falling down at the exposed roots on the tree lawn. He mumbled something about moldy pork chops and burst into a mad giggle just as my mother's summons came slicing through the darkening day. Immediately, I restarted the human engine of my vehicle, an inarticulate blur glided toward home.

My mother stood on the front porch, her arms interlaced across her chest, all her weight on one foot. With the flood light of blue t.v. reflections violently pulsing behind her and the bright green grass slowly turning a hazy purple, I recognized her stern attempt to project maternal authority. I hopped off my bike which fell into the front yard hedge, normally the kickstand shrub would support and protect my vehicle all night with only a midmorning frown from my father as he attempted to back the car out of the driveway. "Put your bicycle away and come inside," my mother commanded. And there was laughter.

Years later after the Cliftons moved off the street, an overheard dinner conversation explained the strange behavior of that night. My mother, when the table discussion swung to gardening, told her guests of the beer and slug trick but warned them that the beer might attract naughty eleven year old boys from next door looking for a quick buzz.

Karen Downie's poetry is like that kid drinking sluggy beer in the summer twilight, drunk on its own innocence and ingenuity, overwhelmed by the weird sensations that it finds itself producing.

### Variations on a Theme

"I have spent too long pouring over the poet's verse. I am no longer weary, I am finally disgusted. How many days have I thrown away in order to decode, coordinate, and understand?"

- Rene fFarben *Whitman on his Deathbed* 1927.

Rene fFarben concisely reduced the effect poetry is capable of exerting in his ambivalent essay *Whitman*



on his *Deathbed*. fFarben concluded that in spite of the pathos he felt while reading the American poet Walt Whitman, he was overwhelmed by what the poems were "about to say". fFarben felt that Whitman, either out of disgust or compassion, could not bring his verse to full expression, therefore fFarben concluded that Whitman was either a simpleton or a mad genius whose encounter with reality and its translation either left him dumbfoundedly mute or shocked beyond words. Regardless, fFarben ended up so nauseated by Whitman's "on the verge of speaking" quality that he threw his copy of Leaves of Grass into the Seine. What is interesting to me as I attempt to introduce this slender volume of poems is that fFarben's reaction seems appropriate while at the same time too simplistic. Maybe it is the American sensibility or my post-modern suburban up-bringing, but it is this very quality of "about to say something" that most enralls and captivates the reading of Downie's poems.

Karen Downie's poems linger on the abyss, squat in the far dusty corners, waiting for one reader to fail to understand them as profoundly as Rene fFarben did Whitman. Her verse, littered with deafening silences and broken understatements, pivots alluringly "on the verge of speaking". Downie's poems' most terrible aspect is this sense that the reader is witnessing an irrelevant confession, a purgation of personal demoniac shadows that haunt the consciousness with guilty insomnia. That her poems are unequivocal indictments brought against those who wield the petty tyranny of authority with a grandeur both callously repulsive and selfishly grandiose. What does this mean? Karen Downie writes through the situation, instead of writing about it. Her verse forever remains wrought in a paralyzed expression which never releases itself into a full stretch of communication. Her poems avoid the situational explanation and bypass direct communication with suspicious glances. Her poems forever remain about to say something, most likely the one thing about you which you are dying to hear, but they never complete the gesture.

### Memory of the Haunted Institution

Populated with ubiquitous succinct narrative voices and a community of disinterested or absent outsiders, Downie's poems flourish in the constricted space of the moment before remembering.

The narrator deflects her participation, disgust, and cruelty by assuming the stagnate weight of waiting, lingering, and calculating the charges against her. By careening between looking glass observations, she filters the dread of lost memory into a more acute paranoia and self-mutilation. The narrator is not victimized by her exclusion from the Institution, but by the affinity it feels toward her, the same affinity she notices herself feeling for the inhabitants suffering within it. She is trapped in an inescapable inclusion, thrust outside by a sensitive proclivity, a heightened residue of memory which is quickly deteriorating into a vague outline. A shadow cast by a forgotten monolith, memory is at once terrible and inciting. She attempts to re-capture the graven image, to peel away the shroud covering the objects whose bulk throws the discernible dark spaces, but she becomes confronted with disgust. She has not found the elusive object, only pathways leading back into the asylum courtyards, skool rooms, and intimate bedrooms. All her attempts to uncover the object of her forgotten memory reaffirm her loss and her direction toward participation in that object's corrosion. She comes to doubt whether there was any object blocking the sun and begins to trust that the shadow itself, as it too slowly slinks away, is all there ever was. The immovable dream, solitude and isolation, become a religious gesture - mythic and symbolic. The narrator waits and doubts about remembering - is it escape or understanding that is about to arrive?

Yet how could either possibly arrive in the absence of the intimate "Other" who is gone, departed, or about to be remembered. The slight residues (fits of wakeful restlessness in the middle of the rainy night) disturb the peace of simple loss or the flight of the fanciful past. Constant mediation on the return and/or re-establishment of the singular voice (the poems' various narrators) caught in the power of a unified "relationship with the Other" (lover, inmate, or captor), occasionally falters at the fractured task so practiced and assured. The task where the past moments are no longer infused into the direct relationship with "the Other," the realization that there is no longer a unified, but rather, a singular voice. Her poems are caught in this terrible instant where the one voice rejoins the distantly departed voice once sounded in unison. This instant only reifies the loss and is, in fact, a momentary lapse in the rebuilding, mourning



process. An instance of forgetful longing for "the Other" who is absent, where the voice one hears is but a shade of the departed.

To speak only of the loss of the past and the possibility that there is no memory is to suffer through all the nightmares conducted against the black darkness of the rising Sun. Downie's poems maybe nothing more than simple reminders that the human conscious condition is a constant battle to place distinct and livable definitions upon the unlabeled coffee tins we keep in our own pantries of suffering and loss.

### Factual Re-Turns

I built upon an Artifice  
calling it Home,  
still the stench  
of familiar structures  
remained.

AND

I remember the  
dark shadow cast  
by the anger-torn  
painting leaning on  
the kitchen wall.

AND

I remember your  
slacks bent at the knee  
rested on the barstool,  
your eyes clouded  
with wine.

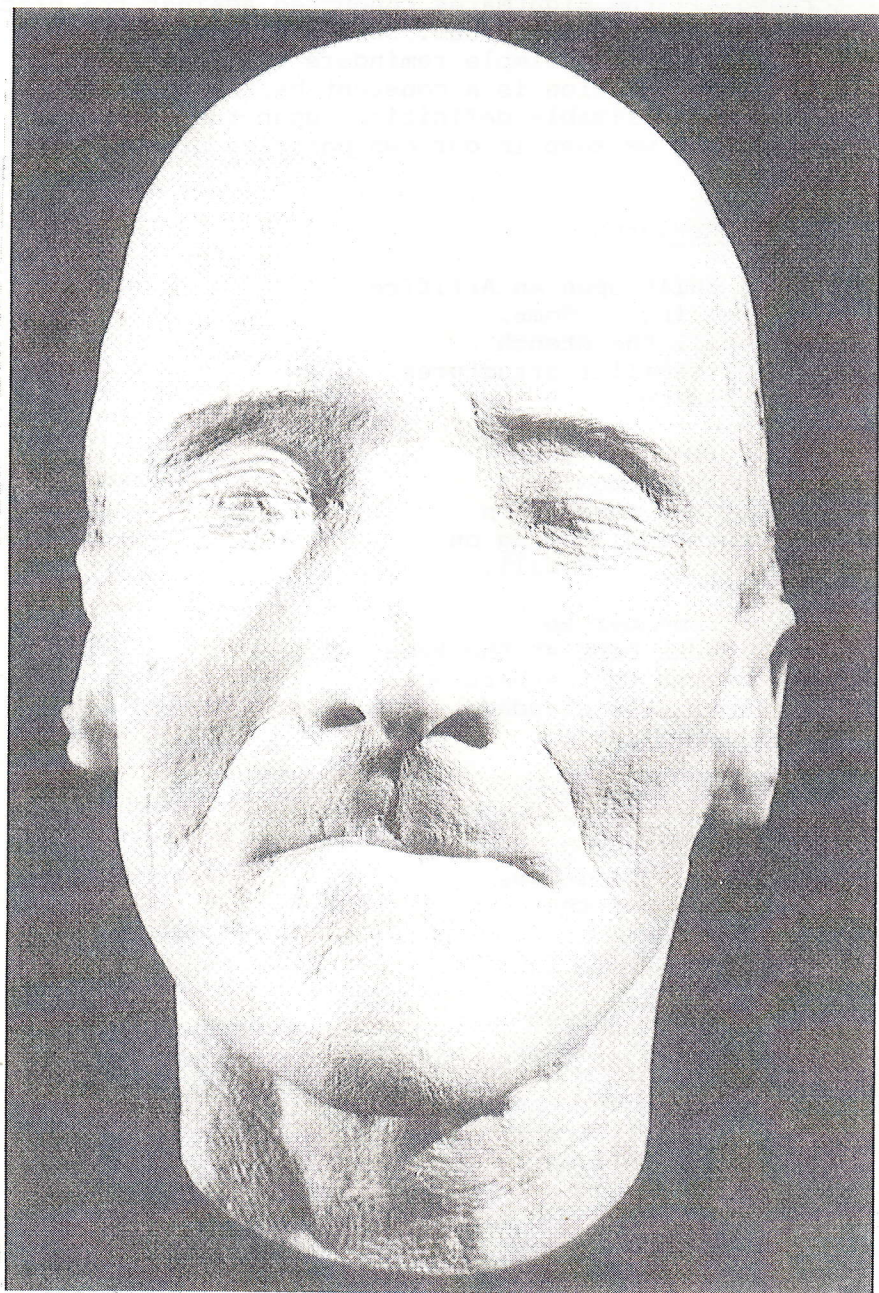
AND

If I remember  
the tales to which  
you listened in  
silent patience,  
it is not to  
remember  
you at all.

To have turned  
the last corner,  
on the last street,  
to discover that  
that Artifice I  
still call home.

October, 1997  
Cleveland Heights.

*the following was written from 1990 to 1996*





## DEDICATION

Remember  
all our songs go out to you.  
We saw you with your wild Indian hair  
blowing in the breeze.

We thought of you every time Pink Floyd came on  
the radio.  
We thought of you every time we put cocaine  
up our nose.  
We thought of you every time we took out little girls,  
we thought of you.  
We wanted to send a Hallmark card to tell you everything,  
everything, everything.

Remember  
all our songs go out to you,  
and every, every, every little thing you do -  
everywhere you walk,  
every time you talk  
about philosophy  
or something big.  
We think of you.

You're on our minds both day and night.  
We think of you  
without a hat in the cold Chicago wintertime.  
We think of you  
with fingers fumbling for a taken to get on the El  
and ride you way straight to hell.  
We think of you.  
You're on our minds both day and night.  
We think of you.

## FIBRILLATOR

My spasmodic valve  
opens, closes, and re-opens  
in a flowery show  
of high-speed photography.  
Please be sure to pass this test.

I am sad for you,  
because of your constant desire,  
but I am wise to that listening  
in your nightly insomnia  
for that serendipitous,  
surreptitious hissing.

So you, too, are afflicted  
with that ringing in your ears.  
(The spoiled child, denied,  
stands immovable, and,  
emits a high-pitched,  
"TEEEEEEEEEEEEE," in protest.)

I was not listening ...  
did they put electrodes on your chest  
at the VA hospital after the war?  
How does your heart beat now?  
Did the test take a long time?

I washed dishes the summer of my arrest.  
I was comfortable before the steaming basins,  
basking in the awareness of my terribleness.  
My heart, though, stopped me cold.  
Stooping over the cool rinse basin,  
I cried for a long time,  
ashamed I was not chosen :  
ashamed, too, at my pathos.  
This could be the consequence of my failure.

I saw you pleading to the camera,



coiling about your world coolly  
and casually,  
least they learn your freakish illness  
and capture it on film forever.

You are delighted  
at these beautiful adder's tongues,  
but stop short, sorry :  
sorry you fail,  
and sorry you strike.

## COURTYARD IN SPRING

The bricks are cold  
but smooth and patterned neatly.  
Frozen rain  
makes them shine  
but the light is artificial.  
Feet trod over  
and back again,  
over one more time  
to scuffle by  
to another yard of stone.

Inside,  
they smoothed the marble down.  
If boots make smooches of soot,  
someone comes by  
with mop in hand  
to lean on till they've gone away.  
They always lean,  
most everyday,  
tired and dissatisfied,  
until they've all gone away.

## THE JAILERS

He was wrinkled  
but couldn't be counted on  
to come this close  
and not break through the interlock.  
They pulled me aside  
in a shut-up warning.  
Landing on the grates  
from a fourth tier fall,  
more than his glasses should have broken.  
Shuffling across the just-mopped floor  
in paper shoes issued by the institute,  
his eyes smiled behind lenses  
held together with clear packing tape.  
I did shut up,  
deferring more to him  
than the jailers.  
The wordless understanding  
forged in a bloody bathtub  
with plastic bags and broomsticks  
didn't seem worthy  
of this accelerated cell growth.  
They had finished another wing,  
his lungs going on useless.  
He shut up, too.  
I have his inmate number on a card somewhere.



## NOT ON MEDS

He awoke from a coma  
and felt his body  
failing in portions,  
unsure if it was shock.

The glasses were drained dropless,  
women danced smoothly,  
novels were written,  
but the synapse still misfired.

The vague heaviness ensued  
and the partnership  
of father and child  
rode squeaking on the wheelchair

over the slate floor,  
keeping the insomniacs  
wakeful while he continued  
to die with her joy.

## DURING SCHOOL

So inflated  
how my stomach fits my mind  
and all the filth when cut, but  
I only want what's mine.

Relaxing is an effort.  
No bruises on my shoulders  
contracting all sore,  
sorely worn out from the touch  
of a wrinkled black man pulling my collar,  
whispering, "Trust."

I didn't want to trust you  
for a Cadillac when you're dead.  
I just got a fifteen year old lying in  
a pool of red;  
he shot to death two classmates during school.  
I dreamed it two nights before.

I wipe your face and clean the hole  
in your chest growing ever more red.  
I listen for your last words to come out  
of your empty head.  
I am alone, killed too.  
I am waiting for your wrinkled mouth  
to whisper.



## TREE OF DISAPPOINTMENT

Inanimate objects always win.  
This is an invocation, however improper,  
beseeching a marvel.  
Come right down and land here.  
I am looking for the specifics  
and I am looking.  
No more flinching when they speak.  
No more focus.

He is dying.  
I am an egoist  
to want what killed him.  
Lots of cars for her to skip town,  
for me and I am nowhere.  
I wish for a miracle,  
but expect the worst and fast.

I am making things right,  
I think.  
He is illusory in the cancer dust,  
(shadowed along the smooth walls)  
saying there are different levels of misery.  
Not an object of lust but a part of my brain,  
he is the supporting root in my tree of disappointment.

## ABSCENT CAT

The multiplier, monadic,  
brings all other factors  
to their zero knees.  
Even at the southern shore,  
basking cats lazy in their matted coats  
hear the quarreling voices,  
get up slowly,  
stretch as a contribution or tithe,  
saunter as liars do,  
and exit this nadir.  
Under the heavens,  
the cipher lords over what love  
labels metis, mongrel, mutt  
and endears the bastards to the stars.  
Compelled, they rocket toward  
the grandfather of philosophy,  
and the theorem is re-codified.  
Frightened by fighting,  
they scratch at us;  
and though the salty waves  
keep it clean, the wound is there now.  
No cares now, as if on another beach,  
they fail to acknowledge this valueless cicatrix.



## THE INVISIBLE THOUGHT PROCESS

Consumed with broken morons,  
we get familiar with lousy Christmases,  
unreliable transportation,  
and letters marked "Return to Sender."

A wolf in sheep's clothing  
appeals to us until,  
childlike,  
we pelt him angrily with tomatoes,  
rocky matter, and hand grenades  
for having the audacity to  
drop his drawers.

You closed yourself off,  
like a room where someone died,  
even before you left.  
Now there's a mob  
underneath the balcony.  
The priest has a bolt  
of orange velvet.

The flashiest confessor  
wears the heaviest yoke  
as a scapular about his shoulders.  
We are not yet pregnant  
with sin.

## LOT'S WIFE

Inhaled deeper  
than compression  
on a forward-moving glide,  
we enjoy fumes  
to the exhaust.  
Old prongs and wires  
stretch like emergent sand,  
a false, gray beach  
we have thirsted  
for sleeplessly,  
dry minerals in our throats.  
We are willing  
the idea  
of barter, commerce, exchange;  
the technique is  
an act of God :  
worthiest shaft  
glimmering in the rubble,  
the lover is  
sold for a meal.





## TO PATRICK HURLEY, POSTURING AS A GANGSTER WHILE IN THE HOSPITAL

The pinstriped suit is sadly sagging  
and it used to fit so well  
you and your hard-luck stories.  
The elevator of life, now up, now down,  
crosses through the mezzanine,  
crashes in the garage.  
Huddled in a wheel well,  
stealing heat from a just-parked car,  
you keep a watchful eye on the door.  
When you get the signal,  
it will be time to go.

Flat and tired as the latex paint  
in the new bedroom  
you'll never enjoy,  
you are this room now;  
it matches you perfectly.  
A passing glance completely misses you  
languid on the bed,  
gazing, bored, out the window  
at the same stupid street.  
You are camouflaged.

I cannot see you at all now  
and I feel helplessly responsible  
for my blind idiocy.  
You wonder why I spoke in code,  
to you only,  
harshly warning you,  
or gesticulating with a pink comb.  
The gestures were not sufficient  
to slow your retreat to some dark corner  
where you are not interrupted,  
kicked, or threatened.



## VIA FORT LAUDERDALE

'The sister's phone number  
would not even  
be a long distance all.  
'Those wholesome white faces  
who know the earth  
are bigger than the sky  
in my mind now  
while another pretend  
holiday is  
smiling a liar's smile  
on agendas  
made up for health reasons.

A chance meeting :  
"I never thought I'd see  
you again. How  
are you since we last met?"  
'The words are wrong  
like a maddening drunk  
night when you think  
you are so brilliant.  
'This ghetto tracks  
circles of endless streets  
through the Midwest.  
I leave for Eleuthra  
in the morning.



## COMING HOME ON THE EL

Feel nothing,  
just count the little, twinkling lights on the river  
that glimmer and disappear  
so often you're not sure that they're there.  
Keep your eyes open and watch the road.  
Feel nothing  
as those teary, infant waves  
come rushing in around you,  
frigid, familiar.

Hear the tracks  
clanking under the train in a sure  
and steady cadence.  
Hold the pattern in your ears  
even as you listen for movement  
in the sleeping man across the aisle;  
he leaves at the same stop.  
Listen and keep feeling nothing  
as you study the tear in his trousers.

If you begin to remember, stop.  
If you remember growing up  
and the first time you fell  
when there was no one around  
to patronize or shame you, stop.  
If you remember the blood on your hands  
and the indecision in the drugstore  
(what will make me better?),  
stop.  
This February night is a prison  
with no hope of morning, of summer.  
The light is blue in the early hours  
when you are starving; it has been so long  
since dinner, since home and steam heat...  
longer since your mother, since safety, since rest.  
And the train runs slowly at this hour,  
so you should feel nothing,  
or risk crying again.

## IRISH CONFETTI

I had swilled it down well,  
lying on the bed  
imagining you were sorry.  
I pulled it off the time you dragged me  
through the ill-lit streets,  
shivering in the autumn wind,  
knowing I should have been dead.

Sleeping, sleeping into the morning  
in the back of my car  
and doing it all for spite,  
still smiling sweetly  
to hide the secret that  
I wished you would pay  
for both of those long, cold winters.

You threw a brick  
but I caught it well.  
You never would have suspected  
my skill and dexterity  
in being so wrong as you.  
Hurling it back, the filth  
of the banshees comes out of my mouth.  
Devoid of pretension and drama, you see  
you were simply wrong all along.  
And I'll return the slap  
again and again.

## THE EASE OF NEW PRODUCTS

The sea lions, asleep on the buoy  
are Saturday morning children  
prostrate before the television  
which promises the ease of new products.  
The wind whips in cold and sudden;  
even the cool water is warmer now.  
They finally slide off their perches and drown.

## DUE WEST, JUST PAST THE STATION

He danced like a woman  
in the one room apartment near the train tracks.  
The barren windows offered no veil,  
no protection against the commuter's intrusive eyes.  
Anyone could see his blurred nakedness  
if they happened to look out the car window,  
due West, just past the station.

## WEDDING DREAM

Tomorrow begins a life of compromise  
to end the pit-of-the-stomach discomfort,  
that bubbling, gurgling feeling  
I have when I wake up sweating,  
thinking I have smothered in her cold,  
silky, taffeta gown.  
She is radiant and does not expire.

## UNCLE WALLY'S BAR

I am leaving  
this lone star bottle,  
my only sun,  
and the woman who thanked me.  
The picture in the shaving kit  
was a non-sequitar.

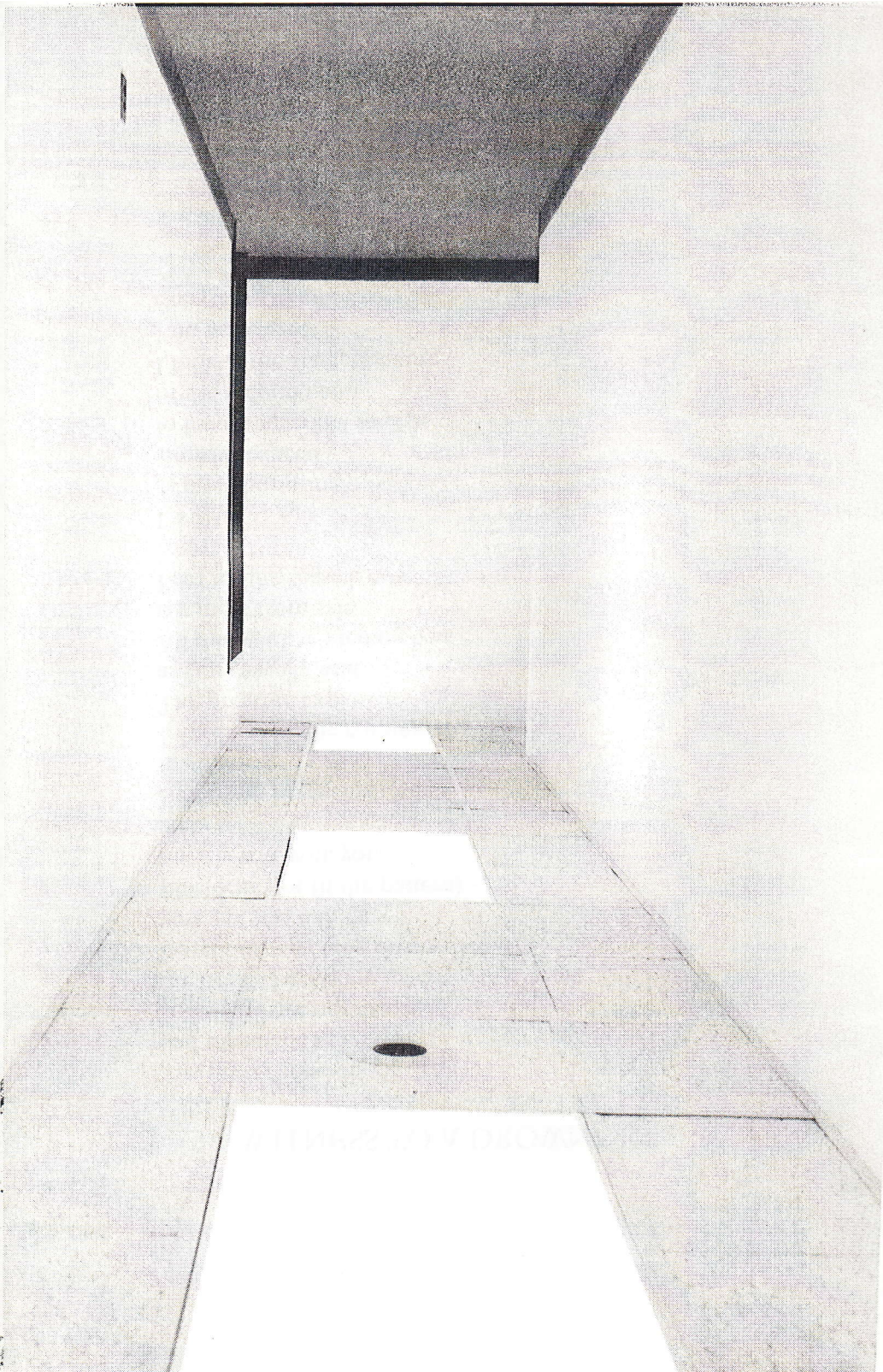


## A PROMISE OR A THREAT

Drinking is the best kind of pastime.  
A shudder of alcohol swilled,  
and quickly forgotten,  
does wonders for that filthy fire escape,  
the humidity outside,  
and the wailing woman next door.  
They hardly exist  
by way of a little nip.

Relatives couldn't stand up straight.  
They beat Grandmother  
and threw her down the stairs.  
Someone fell asleep  
right on the front lawn.

It's clean and cool in here  
and I notice no neighbors  
but something pushes on my head.  
Ruin me, drag me down.  
The gutless masses do not  
speak our mind.  
Plow through me and all into me  
for a shared delusion  
or I'll drink,  
like your mother,  
for posterity.





## WITNESS TO A DROWNING

The stars shone disapproval  
and the sirens sang,  
seemingly out of place in  
the devil's backbone.  
Boredom, watching divers dive -  
your gut too full, fat  
(this does not fit the pattern) -  
but it's you, you, you.

I clear my Eustachian tubes  
in submerged panic,  
forgot to breathe coming up.  
The pressure explodes  
as you casually wait.  
All that wild, whitening hair  
is a mess from salt.  
I am feeling seasick now.

I will lie to you  
as now, honoring mistakes  
already reduced  
to inconsequential sweeps  
of the second hand.  
I look at the stars, thinking  
I do not expect  
everything to end this way.

## THE DOG AND THE WOMAN

There's a black-haired woman taunting me  
because she was there on the last night  
and she heard you lock the door behind me.  
She knows the inside of my mind  
like she could see inside your room.  
A white dog was at the foot of your bed  
and he wasn't sure what was going on,  
but the movement and noise were fascinating.  
The dog had never been so intent  
and now he follows me everywhere.  
People rapped on the window from the fire escape  
because they knew who was inside  
and they're the same ones who smiled knowingly  
when we came back out to bright light.  
It's as if they were laughing in their brains.  
The dog and the woman laughed, too.  
They laughed at me, though, and not at you.  
Their mouths were shut, but how they roared!  
They saw me kick a tripwire, step in a net,  
and roll over with my face in the dirt.  
Now my teeth grind on the sand in my mouth :  
Spit! Spit! But I can't get the last grain out.  
Just when I  
think my mouth is clean,  
my teeth close down in a discourteous clamp  
upon some abrasive reminder  
that we had different expectations.  
The profound discomfort in my face  
from grating on something so small  
is as nothing, common and comedic.



## THERE IS ALWAYS HISTORY

'The riot was intoxicating.  
It was wintertime and  
the sewer maintenance used a pit  
of open flame to salvage pipes.  
Blue overcoats and frightened horses  
edged the masses toward the fire.  
A man beat upon a window,  
looking to break glass  
and turn heads.  
'The artifice was gone.  
'The philosophers had fled  
for fear of arrest  
and the stragglers rode  
on instinct only,  
trying not to slip on the slick path  
leading toward the flame.  
As the heat began to tease their backs,  
the fear that had settled  
upon their faces melted  
into the passive satisfaction  
that there is always history.

## PARADIGM OF SOCIAL TRUST

The wanting teeth  
were the longest  
of horses.

That night was cool  
enough for jackets  
as the black girl  
danced in a black  
unitard  
before the mirror.  
You had had her.

This psychic salon  
has a small settee  
and close parlor walls  
so if anyone entered,  
they would intrude.  
Too stupid for the basic  
paradigm of social trust  
and responsibility,  
the sitter sits.

## LOYALIST ATTEMPT AT SEASONAL LABOR

You are both wielding a scepter,  
not speaking,  
but throwing that serfdom jive.  
But Lord! You are in my heart  
and, dumb as autumn,  
I make like nature,  
so beautiful before the lights go out.

I cannot avoid her  
but neither could the two of you.  
She knows varied pleasures  
that haven't even occurred to me.  
The simpleton gets offensive in his joking,  
so you knock out his teeth  
and the Why on his face penetrates me  
before he stops moving.

The merciless human capital argument  
eats the salamander's air  
and grows into a large ledger full of figures.  
You are better-suited to her superiority;  
my lean times are abortive  
and my nitrites a pinprick.

I want a thousand trees  
to fall down,  
traversing one another  
during their slow motion plunge  
to be crossed bayonets over the path.  
You will both pass through,  
barely recognizable under all those clothes,  
but I will know who is which  
by these papers permanently filed.

## UNTITLED HAIKU

Hide in the shade tree.  
Promise to wait for me there.  
Fall withers all things.

## SEEK IT YET AGAIN

The mouth is too unguarded  
and has fallen open,  
fixedly gawking.  
The hands that used to grapple,  
the hands that used to smooth,  
are stationed nearby motionless,  
motionless to a fault.

The sun comes in and the train goes by  
but the mouth  
does not move to close.  
The hands are silent as alter boys,  
though the phone is ringing again.  
The phone  
and the train  
and the sun  
are strident songbirds  
that would inspire ambition  
in more responsible souls.

False hopes fall hopelessly  
and are otherwise uninteresting.  
The corpses we crawl into at dark  
do not fascinate us all.  
But the mouth once moved  
and the hands once stirred  
and I will seek it yet again.



## AN ADULT RETROSPECT

I had an impure thought  
in the G chair  
and you were there...  
and you, and you,  
and the disappearance  
was just a dream.  
The jokes were not laughed at.  
They stared in shock  
at your fatted belly,  
my stunted hand occupying your skin.  
I drove home drunk again  
but no wine passed  
over my lips.  
The blinding confusion  
pulls the wheel left  
and turns the lamps  
on the fog-light setting.  
You deliberately  
kept your knee there,  
would not move it  
when your friends got nervous.  
After leaving the bar,  
I rode alone  
watching the dash  
for that shrieking demon,  
shaming me more than you,  
like I should know  
or give away  
the unreturnable.  
(I'd go off the road, too.)  
Soon it will pass  
and I won't care  
about another loss.

We can't help each other.  
You cannot hear  
through the layers  
of atmosphere  
separating us now.  
When I met you in hell  
I imagined  
we would repent  
and exit together.  
Now I am watching you  
from the crested butte,  
tempted again  
to plummet back to you.  
I live with the symbols  
of generic  
vulgarity  
that accompany youth.  
An adult retrospect  
makes it stupid,  
a compromise.  
You still laugh bitterly  
and I smile along, too.  
You understand.  
I want you to  
continue without me.

## LIMITLESS

My brother, with stalagmite strength,  
bores holes into heaven;  
the atmosphere thinly veneers  
the soulessness of angels.  
We all have our point to prove.

His planetary presence so large,  
attracting moons to go round,  
then jettisoning them away,  
back into some other solid mass  
is the meanest  
most primitive fancy.

He watches galaxies unfold before him,  
a Sunday paper that,  
when read through,  
speaks nothing to his superiority  
of mind and mindlessness.  
He forgets to call  
when he moves away,  
a cradle-grave robber,  
crusty and ever larger,  
forming a limitless expanse  
of megalith.

## TREAT YOU LIKE A GOD

When I got a job  
and started paying taxes,  
it was painful. Clear -  
ly now the enemy,  
I could not drive free.  
I still like a bypass, though.

Coming home tonight  
I was sure I would be shot,  
trespassing where the  
houses, boarded, falling down,  
warn away tenants,  
conjure sighs in carpenters.

All the loiters  
stood up straight and stared at me.  
God just let me get  
back to the lake shore unscathed  
and I'll never ask  
anything of you again.

I did not die, and  
I did not thank God either...  
conveniently  
forgot I could have hit some  
child running across  
the path of my wickedness.



## THE DASHED FOOT

Today I became Jerusalem  
getting perfume,  
powdering the sheets,  
and calling the old standby  
lover who never really loved  
but was somewhat reliable.  
This woman here is a lie, a story  
or a fable of implosions,  
botched reasoning,  
and the Tower of Babel,  
tweezing the splinter from a bleeding foot  
because her winged (albeit fair-weather)  
friends missed their appointment.

The time cards are all punched  
and the numbers are taken,  
so standing in line will not ensure a turn.  
I am too late sorry again  
with hideous tears streaking the powder  
to reveal the sweet spot.  
Yes, hit there, please.  
I really thought some resolution would come  
and amends could be made to ensure  
the formula happy ending.  
I wonder now if he had been whispering,  
"The whore. The whore."

## INCUBUS

The incubus arrived this morning  
dressed in your long johns.

Attractively sylph-like,  
he clattered through the kitchen  
and made for the bookshelf,  
parroting magnitudinous words,  
laughing, mouth closed,  
through his nose.

The care and concentration  
pulled from his black satch  
clouded the closed air  
of the room shut up for winter.

The asphyxiated brain-snap ensued.  
He said the meandering, tingling  
sensation was the latest thing fancied,  
youths shrugging off  
innocence for a sample,  
then threw up on the rug.

(The emission trickling onto your undershirt.)

We are miscible, he said,  
clambering into bed,  
so keep your beautiful eye open.

## THIE CENTURY'S PLAUGE

'The cat's collar hanging on the doorknob  
jingled when anyone passed through.  
I waited and listened, somnambulant,  
focused, to hear if it was you.

**M.** called you once, wrote you  
to demand some austerity and self-control.  
I was sure I had this century's plague,  
so freely did you spill your seed.

## QUEENSBOROUGH BRIDGE

The much-maligned sandals  
plodding up toward the bridge  
that has its own song  
made me more sore than wealth  
watching olive-skinned men  
in late model sedans  
come across for morsels.

I thought God had forgotten,  
reneged on the deal  
of the golden door  
as an Asian storm poured  
on all the black bean cakes,  
black haired ones scurrying  
ridiculously,  
already lost and wet.

The white planes fly over  
the international  
building by the river -  
crisp statues in the sky -  
bluer than the rumor  
that He had indeed  
left us here to collapse  
onto our scheduled grids.

I am incredulous  
and must undo my shoes,  
hasten toward Harlem,  
gesticulate to an  
olive-skinned cab driver,  
get to LaGuardia,  
and reluctantly fly  
(though I am exhausted  
from walking fifty two  
blocks with no dollars to  
allow me to stop for  
the most nourishing pie.)



## THE IMPIETY OF GROWTH

My blood,  
if you return,  
will flow longer  
than the double yellow  
highway lines,  
putting me to sleep  
in new-shorn sheep de-elevation.

I hope you come back  
so we don't get worse.  
My emasculated willpower  
picks up the hard plastic  
and holds it into my body  
like cherished family  
dying, as if my heartbeat  
could reassure your return.

My water droplet  
lens on life,  
so pretty and so pure  
is far removed  
from your moving car window.  
But coincidences happen,  
and you, or I  
could make a wrong turn,  
annoyed at the length  
of the flat farm fields,  
the impiety of growth.

If agriculture has de-evolved  
into compact parcels  
of criss-crossed land  
cut up by hissing highways,  
we are lost.  
Bleeding ourselves faster  
to faster clean the wound,  
we see some of these ways  
are infinite cul-de-sacs,  
but you must hurry if you can.

## A HEALTHY LIVING

The longest closed-eye journey  
emanates upward  
from the chest : sleep will come now.

He can walk with me again.  
I am so surprised,  
excited enough to wake,

but angry I am missing  
the lying pictures  
I will never remember.

He lost the garden, could not  
keep up with the beds.  
Besides that, nothing mattered.

The institution did not  
copy well his home,  
wasted on his paltry frame

hooked into unfamiliar  
machines gurgling  
like yellow bile in his throat.

The technology is new  
and seems ferocious  
when the nurses dim the lights.

In youth his smile was awkward  
but his hands were strong  
and earned a healthy living.

The nest egg cracks before science :  
cryogenics for  
an empty eternity

of wistfulness for past days.  
I do not want him back  
like this, maybe not at all.

So compromised were those days,  
I can't remember  
how he finally did die.







## DANCE OF FORGETTING

There will be sky over  
a desert plane, a very few  
trees probing up and  
out, dry sticks unsuccessful in  
an effort to cover  
its face. They are calm, are calm with doubts  
skipping sand-like on  
the air. Little granules dance a  
dance in the endless  
gray vault.  
It is the dance of forgetting.

They are magnitudinous and  
blue, not sad, but void.  
Whether the superficial change  
sends a message in  
the wind, dancing and fluttering  
is irrelevant,  
does not matter. The same gray, quiet  
air has come to a  
time-warp standstill inside a mind  
that forgets. Over  
a hundred thousand years could not  
eradicate a  
desert or make a sky full.

It is easier to  
see it this way that to soldier  
for an improvement. It  
is easier to relate to  
the world; it's merely  
the same inside - as mere as an  
attempt to cover the  
sky with crisp, dry sticks, with a vast  
film of dust.



## I WANNA DO FOR YOU

It's not easy  
learning to walk again.  
My heart was sleazy,  
but I consider you a friend.  
I wanna do for you  
all the things a woman is 'sposed to :  
get up in the morning,  
cook you breakfast,  
iron your pants,  
teach you how to speak French,  
teach you how to dance,  
teach you how to be gentle,  
teach you what it's like  
to finally be nice.  
You could never be nice if you tried.

Your ugly sin -  
your teeth are biting my chin -  
your ugly, ugly sin  
(your teeth are biting my chin)  
I wanna get close to someone who won't break from  
my hands.

My hands are tied and I'm a mess,  
beaten down, beaten up  
in my good party dress.  
Getting drunk, throwing down the stairs  
all your garbage  
all your garbage, but  
I wanna do for you.

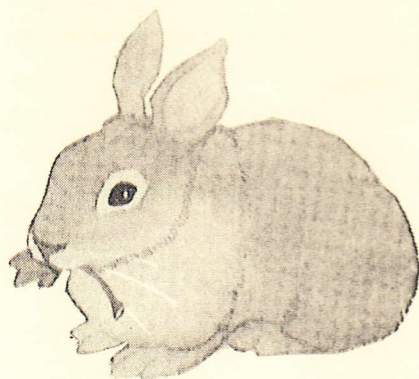
I wanna do the things I can't :  
teach you French,

teach you how to dance, yeah,  
teach you how to be gentle,  
you could be nice  
like you never were before.

I wanna do for you  
all the things a woman is 'sposed to do.  
I wanna do for you,  
but you won't let me, let me.

Don't touch me.

**L'OVE  
BUNNI  
PRESS**



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